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ORGANIZING FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

SUPER-CABINET OFFICERS AND SUPERSTAFFS

STUDY

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BY ITS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL POLICY MACHINERY

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FOREWORD

The Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery has been making a nonpartisan study of how our Government can best organize to formulate and execute national security policy.

During the past year, the subcommittee has sought the counsel of present and former officials of the Government, outstanding private citizens, eminent scientists, military leaders, and distinguished students of the policy process. The subcommittee has also taken extensive testimony in public and executive session. Throughout, the spirit of its inquiry has been scholarly and objective, and advice has been sought without regard to party.

In the next few months a series of staff reports will be issued containing recommendations for improvements of the policy process. These will be followed with proposals for legislative action where appropriate.

Among the matters to be discussed in these staff reports are problems of recruiting and retaining talented people for the national security departments and agencies; the National Security Council and its subordinate machinery; the budgetary process; the roles of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense; and the relationship of science and technology to the policy process.

Testimony given the subcommittee has established that the executive branch is not now organized to do its best in pulling together the policies and programs of the departments, agencies, and armed services in the cause of a coherent national strategy. The difficulties brought to light in the testimony are deep seated, and not amenable to quick or easy correction.

In the minds of some, these problems seem impossible of solution except through far-reaching and novel changes in Government organization. Such changes have in common the creation of a "super-Cabinet" officer or a "superstaff" to help the President better discharge his national security responsibilities.

The purpose of this first study is to examine the merit of such proposals and to provide an introduction to the specific recommendations for improvements in the policy process which will be discussed in subsequent reports.

HENRY M. JACKSON,
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery.

NOVEMBER 16, 1960.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of a series of staff reports to be issued by the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery during the next few months. Drawing upon testimony and counsel given the subcommittee during this past year, the reports will make detailed recommendations for improving the national security policymaking process.

These studies will be appearing at a time when a new President is preparing to take over the reins of our Government. There is widespread agreement that the executive branch of our Government is not now giving the President all the support he needs in meeting his responsibilities in foreign and defense affairs. This unsatisfactory situation has been clearly brought out in the testimony given the subcommittee and in comments by other competent authorities.

The magnitude and the apparent intractability of many of these difficulties have led some to believe that the problems can be solved only by radical organizational changes. The changes proposed would tend to shift the center of gravity in policy development and coordination away from the great departments of the Government and closer toward the Presidential level. The proposals have in common the creation of "super-Cabinet" officers or "super-Cabinet" staffs.

This first report has a limited aim. Its purpose is to examine the merit of these proposals and to provide a background for the detailed suggestions for improving policy machinery which will be contained in forthcoming reports.

THE BESETTING PROBLEM

By law and practice the President is responsible for the conduct of foreign relations. He is Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. He directs the departments and agencies. He makes the key decisions on the executive budget. He cannot delegate these great tasks to any council or committee. The responsibility is his, and his alone.

New dimensions of national security make the proper exercise of the President's responsibility more difficult than ever before in our history.

The line between foreign and domestic policy, never clear to begin with, has now almost been erased. Foreign policy and military policy have become more inseparable than ever. The tools of foreign policy have multiplied to include economic aid, information, technical assistance, scientific help, educational and cultural exchange, and foreign military assistance.

Historically, a President has looked to the Department of State for his principal help in developing and executing foreign policy. But today the sphere of the Department of State is far narrower than the full range of contemporary foreign relations. As an organization, the Department of State can now claim no greater concern in certain aspects of foreign policy than the Department of Defense. The interest of Treasury and Agriculture in some areas of international affairs is almost equal to that of State.

Indeed, today, almost every department of our Government, and some 18 independent agencies also, are involved with national security policy. Four Government agencies and six international financial organizations work in the field of foreign economic aid alone.

The net result is this: The planning and execution of national security policy cut across the jurisdiction of many departments and agencies. This situation imposes upon the President a heavy burden. A host of responsible protagonists urge divergent advice upon him. He must resolve these conflicting approaches, select his own course of action, and see to its faithful and efficient execution by the very officials whose advice he may have rejected.

Presidents have in the past employed the budgetary process as an instrument for policy and program review and coordination. The budgetary process, in other words, has been traditionally much more than an exercise in accountancy, in the sense of merely keeping ledgers on the cost of ongoing and contemplated programs. Recent years, however, have seen a decline in the use of the budgetary process as a prime tool of the President in program evaluation and integration. The process has become more and more limited to an overly narrow concern for the fiscal aspects of foreign policy and defense programs.

Throughout the past decade, increasingly elaborate and complicated interdepartmental mechanisms have been created to assist the President in policy development, coordination, and execution. The best known of these bodies is the National Security Council and its subordinate organs, the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board. At last count, there were some 160 other formal interdepartmental and interagency committees in the field of international affairs alone.

This interdepartmental machinery has certain inherent limitations in assisting the President.

Committees, including the National Security Council, are primarily coordinating mechanisms. But they can coordinate and integrate only what their members bring to them; they cannot originate national security policy. The role of a committee in policy formulation is essentially critical and cautionary, not creative. The prime source of policy innovations is the contribution of a responsible individual who wrestles day in and day out with the problems of national security. Given imaginative proposals from such individuals, a committee may be helpful in criticizing, countering, or embroidering them.

If interdepartmental committees have limitations in policy initiation, they also have inherent shortcomings in policy coordination. The heads of the great departments and major agencies have been unwilling for the most part to concede to interagency committees the authority in policy development and execution which they regard as their right or the President's.

When policy stakes are high and differences in outlook sharp, department heads traditionally have sought to bypass coordinating committees while keeping them busy with secondary matters. Where this has not been possible, department heads have traditionally tried to keep the product of coordination from binding them tightly or specifically to undesired courses of action. The net result has tended to be "coordination" on the lowest common denominator of agreement, which is often tantamount to no coordination at all.

The President has been left in an unenviable position. He has found it necessary to undertake an endless round of negotiations with his own department heads or else he has been confronted at a very late date by crisis situations resulting from the lack of adequate coordination at an earlier stage. The burdens of the President have been increased correspondingly, and after-the-fact improvisation has too often substituted for forward planning.

A FIRST SECRETARY OF THE GOVERNMENT?

Contemplating the problems now faced by a President, some have concluded that he requires the assistance of a new "super-Cabinet" official who would deal across the board with national security problems. The idea is not new. In 1955 former President Hoover suggested creating two appointive Vice Presidents, one responsible for foreign and the other for domestic affairs. More recently, President Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Government Organization has studied variants of the concept of a "super-Cabinet" official.

In July of this year, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, former Chairman of the Advisory Committee, appeared before the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery and made a specific proposal for statutory creation of a "First Secretary" of the Government.

This officer would be appointed by the President subject to Senate confirmation. In Governor Rockefeller's words, he would be "above the Cabinet" and exercise Presidential authority by delegation in all areas "of national security and international affairs." The First Secretary would be authorized "to act for the President * * * at the Prime Ministerial level." He would have statutory designation as "Executive Chairman of NSC" and would have statutory authority by delegation from the President to appoint the heads of subordinate and related interdepartmental committees. The First Secretary would have a staff of his own, and would supervise the personnel of the National Security Council and the Operations Coordinating Board. He would also be "empowered to use and reorganize all of the interdepartmental planning machinery * * * in the area of national security and foreign affairs."

At first glance, the proposal may appear an answer to current difficulties in the operation of policy machinery. The First Secretary's perspective would be expected to encompass the whole range of national security problems. He would be charged with giving committee coordinating mechanisms the stiffening of authoritative direction. Theoretically, he would be no mere White House staff assistant but a super-Cabinet member, thus able to direct fellow Cabinet members in a way that ordinary Presidential aides cannot. Theoretically again, he could relieve a President of many burdens both

within the Government and in negotiations with other chiefs of Government. Finally, he could act as a first adviser to the President on foreign policy in its full modern context.

Careful analysis of the First Secretary proposal, however, reveals serious shortcomings and limitations. The proposal would fail to solve the problems it is meant to meet, and would also introduce grave new difficulties into the working of our national policy machinery.

This proposal raises two problems. One concerns a First Secretary's relationship with department heads.

Giving a man the title of "First Secretary" does not thereby give him power. Under this proposal, the Secretaries of State and Defense and other Cabinet officers would retain their present statutory functions and authority. These officials would continue to be accountable to the Congress for the proper performance of their statutory duties. They would equally continue to be responsible to the President.

Being responsible to the President, the Secretaries of State and Defense and other Cabinet officers would report directly to him. They would be bound to question the decisions of a First Secretary; his placement between them and the President would inevitably generate friction and resentment. The First Secretary could gain the power he needed only if the President consistently accepted the First Secretary's judgment over that of his department heads.

But if the President were consistently so deferential to his First Secretary, who then would be President?

And who would then be willing to be Cabinet officers? The primacy of the First Secretary could conceivably be established by filling Cabinet offices with relatively submissive men who lack strong convictions or much will of their own. But this is a period of history when our Government needs more—not less—vigor and drive in high positions. This end would not be served by choosing for Cabinet positions men who could acquiesce to the downgrading of the historic posts that they are asked to occupy.

A second problem raised by this proposal involves the relations of the First Secretary to the President.

The historical record shows that Presidential assistants draw effective power from their demonstrated intimacy with the President. On numerous occasions in the past, a President has deputized an intimate adviser to take charge of certain plans or operations and to act for him in dealing with department heads. In varying degree, such men as House, Hopkins, Byrnes, and Adams have served effectively as Presidential deputies. But the positions of such men were always very different from that proposed for the First Secretary. Past deputyships have been ad hoc assignments given temporarily at the President's own pleasure to persons in his confidence whose intimacy with him was matched by their complete dependence on him. At the height of their effectiveness in Government, a Hopkins or an Adams drew power, not from statutes, titles, staffs, or paper prerogatives of any sort, but solely from the President's evident confidence in them and reliance on them.

Yet the proposed First Secretary would be in a very poor position to sustain that intimate relationship even if he had it at the outset. His statutory position, his formal status in the Government, his super-

vision of assorted staffs, his chairmanship of manifold committees, his attraction for the press, and his accountability to the Senate which confirmed him—all would mitigate against the maintenance of his close, confidential, personal relationship with the President.

It is most unlikely that a President would in fact give a First Secretary the consistent backing and support he would require to maintain his primacy over other Cabinet members. To do so would run the risk that the First Secretary would become an independent force, politically capable of rivaling the President himself. It would run the further risk of rousing combined opposition from departmental and congressional sources and from affected interest groups.

The likelihood of congressional opposition to domination of departments by a "super-Cabinet" officer rests on the fact that Congress is constitutionally the creator of departments, the source of their statutory mandates, and the steward of their operations. Congressional committees long associated with particular governmental agencies could be expected to side with those agencies in their efforts to assert independence of the First Secretary. He would enjoy no counterpart of the solicitude which congressional committees often show to the heads of departments and agencies within their jurisdiction.

It is essential that a President have full, frank, and frequent discussions with his departmental and agency chiefs. To fully understand the meaning and consequences of alternative courses of action, he must expose himself directly to the clash of argument and counterargument between advocates of different policy courses. Papers, no matter how carefully staffed, can never convey the full meaning of the issues in question. To the degree a First Secretary insulated the President from day-to-day contact with key Cabinet officers, he would leave his chief less knowledgeable than ever about matters he alone had to decide.

Even if the President were to give the First Secretary substantial backing, this official would still be unable to do the job expected of him. For the critical budgetary decisions on the allocation of resources between national security needs and other national needs would still be outside his jurisdiction.

Only the President's responsibility is as wide as the Nation's affairs. Only he can balance domestic, economic, and defense needs—and if anyone else were to be given the job the President would become a kind of constitutional figurehead.

In summary: Our governmental system has no place for a First Secretary. He is thought of as a mediator and a judge of the conflicting national security policies advocated by the major departments, the Congress and its committees, and private groups. But in the American system only one official has the constitutional and political power required to assume that role and to maintain it. That official is the President of the United States. He cannot be relieved of his burdens by supplying him with a "deputy" to do what only he can do.

THE VICE PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

A variation of the First Secretary plan would assign to the Vice President continuing duties in the national security area as a matter of discretionary delegation from the President. One proposal recommends that the President authorize the Vice President to "coordinate

and direct the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, and all of the other instruments of Government" in the general area of national security, excluding defense matters.

Such plans originate in the same dissatisfaction which gives rise to the First Secretary proposal. Yet assigning the Vice President this responsibility would not only create the same problems associated with a First Secretary—it would also produce still other problems.

The specific proposal in question would exclude defense problems from the surveillance of the Vice President. This means that his jurisdiction would end precisely at the wrong point—the point of coordination between diplomatic, economic, and information programs on the one hand and military programs on the other.

A "super-Cabinet" officer whose jurisdiction was confined to that of the most tradition-bound Secretaries of State could do little to integrate foreign and military policy. If anything, the plan would make integration more difficult than it now is. It would reduce the Secretary of State to the level of Vice President's Assistant, and add one more set of relationships which can only be adjusted by the President himself.

A deputyship of this kind for an elected Vice President creates still another difficulty for the President. A modern Vice President is likely to be a person of importance in the President's own party. A broad grant of executive authority to the Vice President could invite eventual misunderstandings and embarrassments between the two highest officials of our Government. The President, it must be remembered, has no control over the Vice President's tenure of office.

The role of the Vice President need not, of course, be limited to his constitutional obligation to preside over the Senate. Many ways of helping the President can be worked out by mutual agreement. When proper occasions arise, these can include tasks in the field of foreign policy. For example, a Vice President can relieve the President of part of the protocol burden; he can undertake special missions abroad; he can from time to time make special studies. He may, of course, play a role of great importance in the relations between the legislative and executive branches.

But any attempt to make the Vice President a kind of Deputy President for Foreign Affairs would be to give the wrong man the wrong job. It would impair the effectiveness of the responsible Cabinet officers, the Vice President, and the President himself.

There have been still more drastic proposals regarding the Vice President which would make him not merely the repository of delegated authority from the President but a full-fledged deputy in the executive branch, charged by statute with authority for direction and coordination.

But the Vice President is constitutionally the presiding officer of the senior body in the legislative branch. The executive power is constitutionally vested in the President who heads another branch. At a minimum, any proposal to vest executive authority in an officer of the legislative branch by statute would raise serious questions involving both the spirit and letter of the Constitution.

A SUPERSTAFF FOR NATIONAL SECURITY?

A "super-Cabinet" official charged with broad responsibilities for national security would, of course, require major staff assistance. Indeed, most proposals for a First Secretary assume he will have the help of a sizable staff.

Some who would stop short of the First Secretary concept would nonetheless establish major White House or Executive Office staffs for national security planning and coordination. A representative proposal of this type would replace the present National Security Council staff, the Planning Board, and the Operations Coordinating Board with a Presidential Staff Agency for National Security Affairs.

The appeal of such an above-the-department staff agency is readily apparent. Those associated with this Agency could presumably view national security problems "in the round"; their horizons would not be limited to the more parochial perspectives of the departments. And not being burdened with day-to-day operating responsibilities, they could presumably do a better job of long-term planning than their harassed counterparts within the departments.

But how much assistance would such an agency give the President? Its plans would lack the coloration, the perspectives, and the realism which come from actual involvement in operating problems. It would be hard to avoid ivory tower thinking. Beyond this, the Agency would create a new layer of planning between the President and the departments and thus insulate and shield him from the full flavor of the planning of responsible operating officials.

Such an agency would, of course, be a bureaucratic rival of the historic departments. It seems safe to say the rivalry would be one sided. The Staff Agency would confront the traditional unwillingness of the departments to surrender their own responsibility for policy development and execution. Lacking the autonomy and fixed entrenchments of a departmental base, such an agency could not compete for long, on favorable terms, with State, Defense, or Treasury.

The end result, in fact, might be the worst of two possible worlds, with the Staff Agency lacking enough power to give the President effective assistance, but sufficiently powerful nonetheless to meddle in the affairs of the great departments.

A President will, of course, need some assistants who concern themselves primarily with national security policy. But such assistants would act as extensions of the President's eyes and ears in a confidential relationship, not as members of a large and highly institutionalized "superstaff."

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that "super-Cabinet" officers or above-the-department "superstaffs" would not ease the problems now faced by the President in setting and maintaining our national course. In fact, such additions to the policy process would make his burdens heavier.

Reforms, to be effective, must be made in terms of the real requirements and possibilities of the American governmental system.

That system provides no alternative to relying upon the President as the judge and arbiter of the forward course of policy for his administration.

It provides no good alternative to reliance upon the great departments for the conduct of executive operations and for the initiation of most policy proposals relating to these operations. Departments possess the statutory authority, the knowledge and experience and the technical staffs needed to advise the President, and the line administrators who alone can implement executive decisions. They will always be the main wellsprings of policy ideas and innovations.

Finally, the American system provides no good alternative to reliance on the budget process as a means of reviewing the ongoing activities of the departments and raising periodically for Presidential decision issues of effectiveness in actual performance.

But to reject the radical solutions is not at the same time to dismiss the besetting problems in which they have their origin. The problems remain. They cannot be solved by maintaining the status quo.

Forthcoming staff reports will make wide-ranging recommendations for changes in the policy process. The promising paths to reform lead in these general directions:

First: There are better ways for the President to delegate more authority for decisionmaking to individual heads of departments and agencies.

There has been too much emphasis on coordination and too little on delegation. Policymaking has tended to be reduced to a group effort where no single person has real authority to act and where no one individual can be rewarded for success or penalized for failure. In the words of Mr. Robert Lovett:

> * * * The authority of the individual executive must be restored: The derogation of the authority of the individual in government, and the exaltation of the anonymous mass, has resulted in a noticeable lack of decisiveness. Committees cannot effectively replace the decisionmaking power of the individual who takes the oath of office; nor can committees provides the essential qualities of leadership * * *.

Second: There are better ways to make the National Security Council a forum for more meaningful debate on issues which the President alone can decide.

One should not ask the National Security Council to do what it is not really capable of doing. The Council is an interagency committee: It can inform, debate, review, adjust, and validate. But, as a collective body, the Council cannot develop bold new ideas or translate them into effective action.

Yet the Council can still be a highly useful advisory mechanism to a President. The evidence strongly suggests that this role can best be discharged by a Council which has fewer rather than more participants in its meetings; which concerns itself only with issues of central importance for Presidential decision; which works through less, rather than more, institutionalized procedures; which relates its activities more closely to the budgetary process; and which gives the Secretary of State a greater role in the development of broad policy initiatives.

Third: There are better ways to enable the Secretary of State to serve the President as first adviser in national security problems.

The Secretary of State *is* the First Secretary of the Government. He should be able to advise the President on the full range of national

security matters, from the point of view of their relation to foreign problems and policies.

The Secretary of State need not and should not have any legal or supervisory authority over other Cabinet officers. Any moves in this direction would have many of the disadvantages of the "super-Cabinet" officer proposal. The goal is not to give the Secretary of State greater command authority: it is to enlarge the scope of his guidance and influence.

If the President is to ask more, and to get more, from the Secretary of State, the Secretary must be better staffed to offer policy guidance and initiatives across the whole span of national security problems. This does not mean a larger Department of State; it may well mean a smaller one. But it does mean a Department competently staffed with generalists, economists, and military and scientific experts to support the Secretary in understanding and following all fields falling within his broad concern.

Fourth: There are better ways to relate military power more closely to foreign policy requirements.

The Secretary of Defense shares with the Secretary of State the main burden of advising the President on national security problems. A full and welcome partnership of the Departments of State and Defense is the prerequisite of coherent political-strategic counsel for the President.

In viewing the Pentagon, one must guard against seeking organizational solutions for problems which are not really organizational in origin. Yet there are reforms which are promising of results. They point in the direction of more vigorous employment of the broad authority already invested in the Secretary of Defense; more active participation of the Secretary of Defense in the deliberations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; increased reliance upon the Joint Staff for planning; an acceleration of existing trends toward functional commands; a budgetary process more consonant with the requirements of modern weapons technology; a promotion system which encourages officers to become versed in the broad problems of national security; a Pentagon career service which does more to develop outstanding civilian officials; and selecting for top policy positions only candidates willing to remain in their posts well beyond the period of apprenticeship on their jobs.

Fifth: There are better ways to make the budgetary process a more effective instrument for reviewing and integrating programs and performance in the area of national security.

There is need to return to the earlier tradition which regarded the budgetary process as a key program management tool of the President.

Budget targets should be regarded not primarily as fiscal instruments but as policy instruments. The investigative analyses needed to achieve and adjust these targets must begin and end with substantive concerns and not simply considerations of administrative organization and financial management.

Sixth: There are better ways to organize the Presidency to intervene flexibly, imaginatively, and fast where gaps in policy development or execution threaten to upset the President's cardinal objectives.

This does not require new and elaborate staff offices or highly institutionalized interdepartmental committees. It calls rather for more discriminating use of able staff assistants right in the immediate office of the President himself who are alert to trouble spots and sensitive to the President's own information needs.

Seventh: There are better ways to attract and retain outstanding officials for both appointive and career posts in the national security departments and agencies.

Poor decisions often result less from poor organization than from poor policymakers. The one thing which could do the most to improve national security policy would be to raise the standards of excellence among career and appointive officials.

The Nation should be grateful for the skill and dedication of those who now man the posts of responsibility in the area of foreign and defense policy. But there is still room for vast improvement in developing and using the rich resources of talent now found among our career officials.

There is room for equally great improvement in eliminating the legal and financial problems which now discourage highly qualified private citizens from serving governmental tours of duty.

And, above all, there is need to abandon the outmoded conventions which have often deprived an administration of the service of members of the opposite political party. The yardstick for making appointments to key national security posts must be ability to do the job, regardless of party.

Specific recommendations for speeding progress in these seven areas, together with suggestions for other reforms of the policy process, will be contained in succeeding staff reports.

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